

Fables, Fantasies,  
and Everyday Things

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Children's Books  
by Artists

November 20, 1992 – January 31, 1993

Whitney Museum of American Art  
945 Madison Avenue  
New York, New York 10021

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Library Fellows of the Whitney Museum, The Dorothea L. Leonhardt Foundation,  
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THE EXHIBITION “Fables, Fantasies, and Everyday Things” presents a sampling of children’s books and related literature illustrated by American artists. Most of the books have been acquired by the the Whitney Museum Library to document another aspect of the work of artists known in the museum world primarily for their painting, sculpture, photography, or film. Whether undertaken as an experiment or as the basis for a second career in illustration, the intensely visual medium of the children’s book has inspired a rich and varied response. Some artists have chosen to subvert the conventions of the genre by directing their efforts to an adult audience, finding imaginative license unavailable in “adult” literature. This exhibition attempts to capture the breadth of this tradition over the last century through a selection of picture books, alphabet books, illustrated fables, folktales, adventure stories and verse, as well as educational books and others, from the fabulous to the factual.

The late nineteenth century saw an enormous growth in the market for children’s books that was linked to an explosion of illustrated publications for adults and children alike. So prevalent was pictorial material during the so-called Golden Age of Illustration, near the turn of the century, that critics feared the flood of pictures would infantilize readers by returning them to a preliterate state. Advances in half-tone reproduction allowed printers to work directly from paintings or drawings and provided publishers with a new route to an audience eager for the classics, the latest novels, or juvenile literature illustrated by “famous” artists.

The Arts and Crafts Movement was instrumental in popularizing pre-industrial sources in art and literature. It

also sought a return to handcraft and “the book beautiful,” which was achieved through the private presses that flourished through the first quarter of this century. For late nineteenth-century romantics, the illustrated book was an opportunity to engage the imagined world of myth, legend, and storytelling. Early in his career, amidst the thriving illustrated book trade of Boston in the 1890s, the American Impressionist Childe Hassam created portraits of young people in history, from “Taia of Thebes” to “Zahra of Bagdad,” for *Youth in Twelve Centuries* (1886). A few decades later, Rockwell Kent’s *A Birthday Book* was published as a signed, limited edition by Random House (originally founded in the twenties as a distributor of fine press books). *A Birthday Book* integrates Kent’s design and illustrations with a text that he wrote himself. It begins: “There was born, not so long ago, a little girl to whose christening came not one but two fairy godmother a Good one, and a Bad one....”

More true-to-life strains of juvenile literature were also common, illustrated by artists accustomed to working in a reportorial style. The realist painter John Sloan illustrated Stephen Crane’s *Great Battles of the World* (1901) for a youthful audience with a taste for *Boy’s Life* adventure stories. In creating graphic paraphrases of the texts he was called on to illustrate, Sloan and others associated with the Ashcan School made use of their art studio training, which had encouraged observation of the “significant moment” in contemporary life. A fellow member of the group, Everett Shinn, was prolific as a children’s book illustrator. Thomas Hart Benton, the regional painter of Missouri, illustrated the American classic *Huckleberry Finn* (1942) in his insistent rhythmic style. Grant Wood celebrated the American rural landscape in *Farm on the Hill* (1936), an educational children’s book. The graphic artist Wanda Gág, although raised in the Midwest, drew on her immigrant roots and a Central European folk tradition to create some of the most beloved children’s books of this century.

Despite their spare, non-representational paintings, a

number of mid-century abstract artists made significant contributions to the field of children's books. Perhaps their special humor and resourcefulness were spurred by a search for alternatives to conventional picture-making and a new appreciation of the child's fresh point of view. Charles G. Shaw's *It Looked Like Spilt Milk* (1947) makes a winsome guessing game for small children out of amorphic forms and liquid variations in print. In contrast, Ad Reinhardt's deft, cartoonlike drawings for the story of a husband defeated by housekeeping in *A Good Man and His Good Wife* (1944) reveals the graphic facility of an artist later known for black on black squares. Although Esphyr Slobodkina set aside pure abstraction to produce classics in the children's book field, such as *Caps for Sale: An Old Folk Tale* (1947), her books incorporate a discerningly reductive sense of pattern, color, and geometry.

René d'Harnoncourt, the artist and cultural impresario who later became director of The Museum of Modern Art in New York, produced what is one of the more visually inventive books of its time. *The Hole in the Wall* (1931) is the story of an artist who paints a mural that literally comes to life. Stepping free of the wall, the artist/subject finds himself caught in a web of trouble from which only his cunning artistry can save him.

Early photographic illustration could and did evoke the fanciful spirit of contemporary graphic illustration through soft-focus techniques or inspired costuming, as in Napoleon Sarony's portraits for Washington Irving's tale of Rip Van Winkle, *A Legend of the Kaatskill Mountains* (1870). But by 1930 a new objectivity prevailed. The first educational children's book to be illustrated by photography, *The First Picture Book: Everyday Things for Babies* by Mary Steichen Martin (Calderone) and her father, Edward Steichen, is a landmark in the field. (Originally published in 1930, it is now republished by the Whitney Museum of American Art with a new afterword by John Updike.) Combining the "straight" modernist aesthetic of photographer Edward Steichen and

the progressive educational aims of his daughter, the book includes twenty-four exquisite photographs of “everyday things” to assist young children in identifying their surroundings. In her preface, Calderone projected a coming era of children’s books illustrated by photography.

Mary Calderone’s empirically grounded approach to children’s education emerged from developmental studies of the 1920s advanced by the *Here and Now* books of Lucy Sprague Mitchell. These theories and the publication of *The First Picture Book* contributed to a wave of photographically illustrated books for “modern” children. By 1932, *Men at Work*, by the child labor reform photographer Lewis W. Hine, met with a burgeoning new market for photography books for both adults and children. In the past sixty years, photography has become increasingly identified with an adult audience while graphic illustration still predominates in children’s books and fantasy literature. Nevertheless, a significant number of photographically illustrated children’s books continues to appeal to a young audience.

Artists have adapted and interpreted the different forms and genres of the children’s book in a variety of ways. The alphabet book found Surrealist variations in Joseph Cornell’s cover for *ABC’s* (1940) and in Man Ray’s *Alphabet for Adults* (1948). An interesting and little-known alphabet book, *The Cubies’ ABC* (1913) seems to have been conceived—or “incubated,” as the title puns—to tweak the pretensions of Cubism and the modernist message of The American Association of Painters and Sculptors. The Book begins: “A is for Art in the Cubies domain—(Not the Art of the Ancients, brand new are the Cubies.) Archipenko’s their guide, Anatomics their bain....” *Andy Warhol’s Index (Book)* of 1967 incorporated the “pop-up” to bring the popular imagery and the output of his studio, The Factory, into high relief. Artists have represented the animal personages and moral content of *Aesop’s Fables* in distinct guises: whether in the playful animations of Alexander Calder, with etchings resembling his wire-sculp-



ture (1931); in the starkly rendered pen and ink of African-American painter Jacob Lawrence (1970); or the highly politicized work of the artist and left-leaning illustrator for *The Masses*, Hugo Gellert (1936).

A number of contemporary artists have taken on the tales of Perrault or the Brothers Grimm, sometimes to engage whatever previously suppressed, psychosexual content may have emerged in more contemporary readings, sometimes out of simple affection for the confectionary “lightness” of our best-loved stories. The photographer William Wegman, for example, has cast ten Weimaraner puppies as Cinderella’s mice (1993). Closer to home, Faith Ringgold’s semi-autobiographical *Tar Beach* (1991) blends realistic observation of a young girl’s life in Harlem with her enchanted vision of the George Washington Bridge as a string of pearls.

MAY CASTLEBERRY, *Librarian*

*Special thanks are extended to Leonard S. Marcus for his suggestions, particularly about the publishing context of The First Picture Book, to Julie Mellby, associate librarian, Whitney Museum of American Art, Victoria Dailey, Michael Weintraub, and the lenders to the exhibition.*



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## BOOKS IN THE EXHIBITION

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*Unless otherwise indicated,  
all exhibited books are in the Library of the  
Whitney Museum of American Art.*

BERENICE ABBOTT (1898-1991)

*Magnet*

By E.G. Valens

Cleveland and New York:

The World Publishing Company, 1964

Collection of Mus White

*Motion*

By E.G. Valens

Cleveland and New York:

The World Publishing Company, 1965

ANSEL ADAMS (1902-1984)

*Michael and Anne in the*

*Yosemite Valley*

By Virginia and Ansel Adams

New York: The Studio Publications,

1941

Collection of Mus White

ALEXANDER ALLAND AND

ALEXANDRA ALLAND

*My Dog Rinty*

By Ellen Tarry and Marie Hall Ets

New York: The Viking Press, 1946

PEGGY BACON (1895-1987)

*The True Philosopher and Other*

*Cat Tales*

By Peggy Bacon

Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1919

*The Ballad of Tangle Street*

By Peggy Bacon

New York: The Macmillan Company,

1929

*The Cat That Jumped Out of the Story*

By Ben Hecht

Philadelphia and Toronto:

The John C. Winston Company, 1947

*The Oddity*

By Peggy Bacon

New York: Pantheon Books, 1962

LEONARD BASKIN (b. 1922)

*Hosie's Aviary*

By Tobias Baskin and Lucretia, Hosie,  
and Lisa Baskin

New York: The Viking Press, 1979

THOMAS HART BENTON (1889-1975)

*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

By Mark Twain

New York: The Limited Editions Club,  
1942

JOHN CAGE (1912-1992)

*Mud Book*

By John Cage and Lois Long

New York: Callaway Editions; London:

David Grob Editions, 1983

ALEXANDER CALDER (1898-1976)

*Fables of Aesop, According to Sir Roger  
L'Estrange*

New York: Harrison of Paris, 1931

Whitney Museum of American Art,

New York; Gift of Mildred and Russell

Lynes, in memory of the artist 76.42a

*A Bestiary*

Compiled by Richard Wilbur

New York: Pantheon Books, 1955

*Roarr: Calder's Circus*

Story by Maira Kalman

Photographs by Donatella Brun

New York: Whitney Museum of  
American Art, 1991

JEAN CHARLOT (1898-1979)

*A Child's Good Night Book*

By Margaret Wise Brown

New York: HarperCollins Publishers,  
1992

GEORGE CONDO (b. 1957)

*Ghost of Chance*

By William S. Burroughs

New York: Library Fellows of the  
Whitney Museum of American Art,  
1991

JOSEPH CORNELL (1903-1973)

*ABC's*

By Charles Henri Ford

Prairie City, Illinois: The Press of  
James A. Decker, 1940

JOHN STEUART CURRY (1897-1946)

*The Red Badge of Courage*

By Stephen Crane

New York: The Heritage Press, 1944

JAMES DAUGHERTY (1889-1974)

*Of Courage Undaunted: Across the  
Continent with Lewis and Clark*

By James Daugherty

New York: The Viking Press, 1951

*Andy and the Lion*

By James Daugherty

New York: The Viking Press, 1969

WALT DISNEY (1901-1966)

*Walt Disney's Fantasia*

By Deems Taylor

New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940

WENDY EWALD

*Magic Eyes: Scenes from an Andean  
Girlhood*

From stories told by Alicia and  
María Vásquez

Seattle: Bay Press, 1992

ANTONIO FRASCONI (b. 1919)

*12 Fables of Aesop*

By Glenway Wescott

New York: The Museum of  
Modern Art, 1954

*See and Say: A Picture Book in Four  
Languages*

By Antonio Frasconi

New York: Harcourt, Brace and  
Company, 1955

*The Little Blind Goat*

By Jan Wahl

Owings Mills, Maryland: Stemmer  
House Publishers, 1981

*At Christmastime*

By Valerie Worth

New York: Michael di Capua  
Books/HarperCollins, 1992

WANDA GÁG (1893-1946)

*Millions of Cats*

By Wanda Gág

New York: Coward-McCann, 1928

*The Funny Thing*

By Wanda Gág

New York: Coward, McCann &  
Geoghegan, 1929

*Snippy and Snappy*

By Wanda Gág

New York: Coward-McCann, 1931

*The ABC Bunny*

By Wanda Gág

New York: Coward McCann, 1933

*Nothing At All*

By Wanda Gág

New York: Coward-McCann, 1941

HUGO GELLERT (1892-1985)

*Comrade Gulliver: An Illustrated Account of Travel into That Strange Country the United States of America*

By Hugo Gellert

New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1935

Copy 2: Collection of R.W. Smith, Bookseller, New Haven

*Aesop Said So*

New York: Covici Friede, Publishers, 1936

ROBERT GOBER (b. 1954)

*Heat*

By Joyce Carol Oates

New York: Library Fellows of the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1989

RED GROOMS (b. 1937)

*Rembrandt Takes A Walk*

By Mark Strand

New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1986

*Ruckus Rodeo*

By Barbara Haskell

New York: Harry N. Abrams in cooperation with the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1988

RENÉ D'HARNONCOURT (1901-1968)

*The Hole in the Wall*

By René d'Harnoncourt

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931

CHILDE HASSAM (1859-1935)

*Bye-o-Baby Ballads*

By Charles Stuart Pratt

Boston: D. Lothrop & Co., 1886

Copy 2: Collection of R.W. Smith, Bookseller, New Haven

*Youth in Twelve Centuries*

By M.E. Blake

Boston: D. Lothrop & Co., 1886

Copy 2: Betsy Beinecke Shirley Collection of Children's Literature, Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University, New Haven

*Verses*

By Celia Thaxter

Boston: D. Lothrop & Co., 1891

LEWIS W. HINE (1874-1940)

*Men at Work: Photographic Studies of Modern Man and Machines*

By Lewis W. Hine

New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932

JESS (b. 1923)

*The Cat and the Blackbird*

By Robert Duncan

San Francisco: White Rabbit Press, 1967

WILLIAM H. JOHNSON (1901-1970)

*Li'l Sis and Uncle Willie: A Story Based on the Life and Paintings of William H. Johnson*

By Gwen Everett

Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1991

CELIA JORDAN

*Babies of Illinois*

By Celia Jordan

Urbana, Illinois: Celia Jordan, 1985

MIKE KELLEY (b. 1954)

*Reconstructed History*

By Mike Kelley

New York: Thea Westreich; Cologne:  
Gisela Capitain, 1990

ROCKWELL KENT (1882-1971)

*A Birthday Book*

By Rockwell Kent

New York: Random House, 1931  
Gift of Flora Miller Biddle

*Beowulf*

Translated by William Ellery Leonard  
New York: Random House, 1932

BARBARA KRUGER (b. 1945)

*My Pretty Pony*

By Stephen King

New York: Library Fellows of the  
Whitney Museum of American Art,  
1988

PAUL LANDACRE (1893-1963) ET AL.

*Doll Dreams*

Edited by Lucile Phillips Morrison<sup>1</sup>  
Hollywood: Hollycrofters, 1932

JACOB LAWRENCE (b. 1917)

*Harriet and the Promised Land*

By Robert Kraus and Gwen Lawrence  
New York: Windmill Books/Simon &  
Shuster, 1968

*Aesop's Fables*

New York: Windmill Books/Simon &  
Shuster, 1970

EARL HARVEY LYALL

*The Cubies' ABC*

By Mary Mills Lyall

New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1913

DANNY LYON (b. 1942)

*I Like to Eat Right on the Dirt: A*

*Child's Journey Back in Space and Time*

By Danny Lyon

Clintondale, New York: Bleak Beauty  
Books, 1989

MAXFIELD PARRISH (1870-1966)

*Poems of Childhood*

By Eugene Field

New York:

Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904

Copy 2: Betsy Beinecke Shirley

Collection of Children's Literature,  
Beinecke Rare Book Library,  
Yale University, New Haven

*The Knave of Hearts*

By Louise Saunders

New York: Charles Scribner's Sons,  
1925

Betsy Beinecke Shirley Collection of  
Children's Literature, Beinecke Rare  
Book Library, Yale University,  
New Haven

JOSEPHINE DIEBITSCH PEARY

*The Snow Baby: A True Story with  
True Pictures*

By Josephine Diebitsch Peary  
New York: Frederick A. Stokes  
Company, 1901

HENRY VARNUM POOR (1888-1970)

*The Call of the Wild*

By Jack London

New York: The Limited Editions Club,  
1960

MAN RAY (1890-1976)

*Alphabet for Adults*

By Man Ray

Beverly Hills: Copley Galleries, 1948  
Collection of Timothy Baum

*Analphabet*

By Man Ray

New York: Nadada Editions, 1974

AD REINHARDT (1913–1967)

*A Good Man and His Good Wife*

By Ruth Krauss

New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1944

Copy 1: Collection of David Stang

Copy 2: Collection of Winifred Machan

FAITH RINGGOLD (b. 1930)

*Tar Beach*

By Faith Ringgold

New York: Crown Publishers, 1991

GORDON ROSS (1873–1946)

*Weather Opinions: A Book of Quotations with Interleaves on Weather Subjects*

Compiled and arranged by Jennie

Day Haines

San Francisco: Paul Elder and Company, 1907

LUCAS SAMARAS (b. 1936)

*Book*

By Lucas Samaras

New York: Pace Editions, 1968

Whitney Museum of American Art,  
New York; Purchase, with funds from  
the Howard and Jean Lipman  
Foundation, Inc. 69.96

NAPOLEON SARONY (1821–1896) ET AL.

*A Legend of the Kaatskill Mountains*

By Washington Irving

New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons,  
Publishers, 1870

MARGARET ERWIN SCHEVILL

*In the Garden of the Home God: A  
Retelling of a Navajo Tale*

Santa Fe: Hazel Dreis Editions, 1943

EVE WATSON SCHÜTZE

*Prose That Every Child Should Know:  
A Selection of the Best Prose of All  
Times for Young People*

Edited by Mary E. Burt

Garden City, New York: Doubleday,  
Page & Company, 1913  
Collection of Mus White

BEN SHAHN (1898–1969)

*The Alphabet of Creation: An Ancient  
Legend from the Zohar*

New York: Pantheon Books, 1954

*Ounce, Dice, Trice*

By Alastair Reid

Boston: Little, Brown & Company,  
1958

CHARLES G. SHAW (1892–1974)

*It Looked Like Spilt Milk*

By Charles G. Shaw

New York: Harper & Row,  
Publishers, 1947  
Republished by HarperCollins, 1992

*The Giant of Central Park*

By Charles G. Shaw

New York: William R. Scott, 1940  
Collection of R.L. Egolf

*The Winter Noisy Book*

By Margaret Wise Brown

New York: Harper & Row, Publishers,  
1947

CINDY SHERMAN (b. 1954)

*Fitcher's Bird*

Based on a tale by the Brothers Grimm  
New York: Rizzoli International  
Publications, 1992



EVERETT SHINN (1876-1953)

*Toby Tyler or Ten Weeks with a Circus*

By James Otis

Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1937

Betsy Beinecke Shirley Collection of Children's Literature, Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University, New Haven

*A Christmas Carol in Prose: Being a Ghost Story of Christmas*

By Charles Dickens

Chicago: The John C. Winston Company, 1938

*Rip Van Winkle*

By Washington Irving

New York: Garden City Publishing, 1939

Betsy Beinecke Shirley Collection of Children's Literature, Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University, New Haven

*The Happy Prince and Other Tales*

By Oscar Wilde

New York: The Literary Guild of America, 1940

*The Man Without a Country*

By Edward Everett Hale

New York: Random House, 1940  
Gift of Lucille and Walter Fillin

*Poems of Childhood*

By James Whitcomb Riley

New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1943  
Gift of Lucille and Walter Fillin

LAURIE SIMMONS (b. 1949)

*Water Ballet/Family Collision*

By Laurie Simmons

Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1987

JOHN SLOAN (1871-1951)

*Great Battles of the World*

By Stephen Crane

London: Chapman & Hall, 1901  
Gift of Lucille and Walter Fillin

LOUIS SLOBODKIN (1903-1975)

*Many Moons*

By James Thurber

New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1943

Copy 2: Betsy Beinecke Shirley Collection of Children's Literature, Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University, New Haven

*The Magic Fishbone*

By Charles Dickens

New York: The Vanguard Press, 1953

Betsy Beinecke Shirley Collection of Children's Literature, Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University, New Haven

ESPHYR SLOBODKINA (b. 1914)

*Caps for Sale: An Old Folk Tale*

By Esphyr Slobodkina

New York: William R. Scott, 1947

*The Clock*

By Esphyr Slobodkina

New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1956

*The Little Dinghy*

By Esphyr Slobodkina

New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1958

*The Long Island Ducklings*

By Esphyr Slobodkina

New York: Lantern Press, 1961

EDWARD STEICHEN (1879-1973)

*The First Picture Book:*

*Everyday Things for Babies*

By Mary Steichen Martin (Calderone)

New York: Harcourt, Brace, and  
Company, 1930

*The Second Picture Book*

By Mary Steichen Martin (Calderone)

New York: Harcourt, Brace, and  
Company, 1931

*The First Picture Book:*

*Everyday Things for Babies*

By Mary Steichen Martin (Calderone)

Afterword by John Updike

New York: Library Fellows of the  
Whitney Museum of American Art,  
1991

*The First Picture Book:*

*Everyday Things for Babies*

By Mary Steichen Martin (Calderone)

Afterword by John Updike

New York: Fotofolio in association with  
the Whitney Museum of American Art,  
1992

DONALD SULTAN (b. 1951)

*Warm and Cold*

By David Mamet

New York: Fawbush Editions, 1985

Collection of Joe Fawbush and  
Thomas Jones

JAMES SWINNERTON (1875-1974)

*Canyon Country Kiddies*

By James Swinnerton

Garden City, New York: Doubleday,  
Page & Company, 1923

PAVEL TCHELITCHEW (1898-1957)

*Yesterday's Children*

Poem by Parker Tyler

New York: Harper & Brothers,  
1944

ANDY WARHOL (1928-1987)

*Andy Warhol's Index (Book)*

New York: Random House, 1967

*Andy Warhol's Children's Book*

Zurich: Bruno Bischofberger, 1983

WILLIAM WEGMAN (b. 1943)

*Cinderella*

By William Wegman

New York: Hyperion Books for  
Children, 1993

EDWARD WESTON (1886-1958)

*The Cats of Wildcat Hill*

By Charis Wilson and Edward Weston

New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce,  
1947

Collection of Mus White

CHARLES WHITE (b. 1918)

*Four Took Freedom: The Lives of  
Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass,  
Robert Smalls, and Blanche K. Bruce*

By Philip Sterling and Rayford Logan

Garden City, New York: Zenith  
Books/Doubleday & Company, 1967  
Heritage Gallery, Los Angeles

GRANT WOOD (1892-1942)

*Farm on the Hill*

By Madeline Darrough Horn

New York and London: Charles

Scribner's Sons, 1936

Copy 2: Collection of Cattermole Books,  
Newbury, Ohio



